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Burial

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Prickly winter air creeps its way into my throat, spreading its roots in my lungs, digging deeper as I cough. My eardrums are sliced by the sharp thwack of the shovel chipping into the dirt. Scraping, peeling, the skin on my hands give away from my desperate grip on the handle. Small chips of earth flick up into the air under each impact of the shovel, as blood from my hands slowly drips onto the ground below. Gnawing at my exposed flesh, searing the wounds with a chilling pain, the cold air is all-consuming around me.

The ground is much too hard for a grave now, I will have to wait until spring to bury her.

Inside, her body sits on our bed, draped by a sheet, the outline of her face barely visible underneath, with faint impressions of eyes and a mouth hung agape. At her passing, her screams of anguish had filled the room, clung to the walls, dug into the floor, and gripped my shoulders as they wormed their way into my brain. But once she passed, I found my hands were possessed by such trembles that I could not close her mouth. So, I muffled the echoes of her screams with a sheet, and she sits silently to me now, but upon seeing her face mangled and twisted in pain, I know the sounds would come back; for they reside still in my head, as they reside in the very bones of this house.

Outside, the wind exhales deeply, its breath seeping through the cracks, crawling up my spine. I shake off its chill in search of something to start the fireplace with. Alas, I had long since run out of firewood, and my ripped hands were not suited for cutting more. The only burnable materials, lest I tear apart my cabin, were her love letters, and a recipe for pie.

“2 cups of Flour
1 teaspoon of Sugar
½ teaspoon of Salt
¼ teaspoon of Ground Cinnamon
¼ teaspoon of Ground Nutmeg
¾ cup of Butter
6 tablespoons of Water
4 cups of fresh Atropa Belladonna berries”

I had no desire to read her letters, as their sickeningly sweet longings now left a sour, bitter taste in my mouth. But I had no

use for the recipe anymore, and with the letters, there was no question, so I grabbed them along with a match and walked them to the fireplace with the chill from outdoors snaking behind me.

Sputtering to life, the fire gradually started as I threw in the recipe. Impatient for a release from nature's icy grip, I threw all of the letters in at once, and in an instant, I was engulfed by an all-consuming flame. I gasped for air, but the flames jumped into my throat, choking me. All at once, wailing, screaming, whispering, sobbing; the sounds spun around me in a vortex of flame. I tried to scream but I could not speak, tried to move my head but I was held in place, tried to cry but this voice, this voice that sounded like her, it occupied every part of my body.

To my eyes, it clawed, scraped, and tore.

To my hands, it grabbed, twisted, and dragged.

To my legs, it bent, snapped, and ripped.

To my head, it banged around, wormed into every crevice of my brain with wails of anguish, betrayal, and wrath.

To my whole body, it chewed. I could feel myself being consumed, all my senses being forcibly wrestled from me as my consciousness hung on until a grotesque, sickly figure shamled towards me. Draped in a sheet, I could still see the outline of her bony hands as they reached out for me, her mouth impossibly unhinged, the screaming growing ever louder until finally, there was nothing.

A desperate gasp for air and my body jerked up. The fireplace cold, a small pile of ash lay at the bottom. Otherwise, the rest of the house was untouched, myself likewise. Suddenly, I felt a soothing spring breeze swaying in, turning to find out that somehow, my front door had been left open. Without thinking I eagerly sprung up and grabbed my shovel. Finally, I could be rid of her, but upon looking into her room I felt a burning lump of fear sink into my stomach.

The bed was empty.